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ABSTRACT

The linkage of the formal structures of higher learning in Islam and the development of higher education in the Medieval West is discussed. Recent findings indicate a transference of instructional methodology and even some organizational forms from Islamdom to the Christian West during the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Islamic models of higher education predate those in Medieval Europe by as much as two centuries. There were ample opportunities for exchange of ideas and the flow of information about Islamic higher education to the West through Spain, Sicily, and Byzantium. Also, both Islam and the Christian West shared a classical Greek heritage. Both Arabic and Latin academic communities showed a parallel structure of instructional methodology. For both Islamic and Christian scholars, scholastic methodology arose from the tension between faith and reason. Scholastic methodology appeared first in legal studies and later in theological studies. As a result of the control of higher education by scholastic methodology, humanistic studies declined in both Islam and the Christian West. Organizational forms in Islamic and Christian higher education are also considered, including the founding of colleges through endowments. (SW)

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ISLAMIC ROOTS OF THE MEDIEVAL UNIVERSITY:

A FORGOTTEN LEGACY

A paper presented by

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ASHE Annual Meeting

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ISLAMIC ROOTS OF THE MEDIEVAL UNIVERSITY: A FORGOTTEN LEGACY

The West has long recognized the importance of the transference of knowledge from Islamic lands during the Middle Ages and its catalytic effect on scholarship and the rise of Medieval universities. While not known popularly, research and publication of this momentous undertaking substantiates the role of Islam as a bridge between the ancient world of Greece and Medieval Christian society, although still not granting all the honor due Islamic scholars responsible for the preservation and advancement of knowledge beyond that inherited from Hellenistic polymaths. Centers of translation existed in Islamic colleges in Spain and Sicily primarily, but individual scholars in other cities as well contributed to the transfer of this intellectual flood to the West. During the tenth and eleventh centuries a great volume of Greek and Arabic scientific commentaries were translated into Latin and entered Western Europe. Our knowledge of Plato, Aristotle Galen, Hypocrates, Euclid, Archimedes, Ptolomy and others derive from these transcriptions. In addition the inventions and elaborations of noted Arabic speaking scientists, physicians, and philosophers became known in the West. This accumulated treasure of knowledge emanated from informal and private structures of higher learning as they

spontaneously appeared in Islamic society, through independent scholars working in study circles, libraries, hospitals, and observatories.

The formal structures of higher learning in Islam, the mosque colleges and the madrasahs, however, are not perceived by Western scholars as progenitors of the institutions of higher learning in the Medieval West. These institutions dominated higher education throughout the Islamic empire as a structured and prolific school system which served as alma mater to great numbers of students and faculty. What impact did these schools have on higher education as it emerged in the Christian West? Their effect appears not as stimulating as that of the translated corpus of Arabic manuscripts and their ultimate quickening on scholarship. Yet Medieval Christianity could not have ignored totally knowledge about such institutions and the instructional methodology they employed. Information of them would have come not only through the translated manuscripts themselves but also through translators and both Christian and Jewish scholars familiar with life in the madrasahs and mosque colleges of Spain and Sicily. Seemingly the infusion of the more formalized aspects of Islamic higher education into our heritage has a missing link, but research by Arabic speaking scholars suggests that such a nexus does indeed exist. Recent findings indicate that a transference of instructional methodology and even

some organizational forms from Islamdom to the Christian West did take place during the eleventh and twelfth centuries.

One cannot ignore the striking parallels in instructional methodology in both systems. Nor can one discount the fact that Islamic models of higher education predate those in Medieval Europe as much as two centuries. Further, ample opportunities abounded to permit exchange of ideas and foster the flow of information about Islamic higher education to the West through Spain, Sicily, and Byzantium. Also, it must be recalled that both Islam and the Christian West shared a classical Greek heritage. The intellectual roots of both cultures lay in Neoplatonic idealism and Aristotelian logic. Byzantium, the direct heir of Hellenistic culture, shared a long frontier with the Islamic empire; manuscripts and scholars moved freely between the two superpowers of that era. Byzantium also bordered Europe and, similarly, manuscripts and scholars flowed back and forth from Byzantium into the Mediterranean basin, particularly the Italian states.

Of the possible influence on the West of Islamic instructional methodology and academic structure, the case of the former stands on much firmer ground. Both Arabic and Latin academic communities evinced a parallel structure of scholastic methodology. It existed almost identically in both higher educational systems not only as a method of

analysis but also as a medium for articulating intellectual concepts. Peripatetic philosophy, a thriving school of Neoplatonic and Aristotelian thought in early Islam, faded in the 10th and 11th centuries as a formal part of higher education. But the methodology of ratiocination and logic derived from the Greeks and championed by Islamic sages did survive in kalim, and through it entered the predominant institutions of higher learning in Islam, the law colleges.

For both Islamic and Christian scholars, scholastic methodology arose from the tension that existed between faith and reason. Both cultures sought a methodology by which to rationalize the faith revealed to them--in one instance through the Koran and in the other through the Bible --with the reality of human experience. Each pursued a methodology relying upon logic to bring harmony to the discordance of their intellectual lives. In both societies, learned men accepted the challenge to harmonize religious authority which permeated the civil order with the intellectual fruits of their own reasoning. This rationalistic approach to the world-view around them became more structured and formal through the passage of time.

In Islam and Christianity basic assumptions in philosophy and faith derived from Divine revelation. Yet learned men in each demonination embraced the deductive method, engaging logic to arrive at valid interpretations of religious dogma and to inform the conscience of moral

behavior while defining right action in a practical world. In both cultures, the revelation remained unquestioned, and the tenets of religious faith were presented always as unassailable truth. In Islam where advanced instruction in religion focused primarily on the study of jurisprudence, scholasticism found its home in the mosque colleges and madrasahs dedicated to the study of religious law. There it evolved into a formalized methodology.

Although in later years, scholasticism was most associated with philosophy and theology, evidence supports the contention that its origination in the West occcurred first in the study of law, much as it did in Islam. Grabmann demonstrates that scholasticism appeared first in the study of canon law around the year 1100 in the writings of Bernold of Constance (d. 1100), who used the form of disputed questions to defend the religious pronouncements of Pope Gregory VII.[1] While setting opposing statements on religious issues side by side, he also suggested a set of rules by which an individual could resolve the contrary views. Evo of Chartres (1116) also used this method, sometimes called Sic et Non, prior to Abelard.[2] In the Decretum, Evo also cites rules for reconciling conflicting texts. Those influenced by the work of Evo included Alger of Liege, Hugh of St. Victor, and Abelard. Canon law received its greatest impetus at this time in the teaching and writing of Gratian of Bologna (c.

1250), who, borrowing heavily from Evo and Alger, wrote a great tome, Concordia Discordantium Canonum, in which he presents some 4000 disputed statements with rules for their validation.[3]

For the Christian West, however, Abelard's famous Sic et Non endures as the nascent opus on scholastic methodology in the study of philosophy and theology. But further evidence of the use of scholastic methodology in the study of law in the West comes from the studies of Kantorowicz, who also investigated the glossiters of canon law in the 12th and 13th centuries.[4] He analyzed the works of many teachers of the law, particularly those of Bulgarus (died c. 1166), whom he claims originated the methodology of disputed questions. Kantorowicz also substantiates the use of the reportatio as used in legal studies at about the same time.

The importance of recognizing that scholastic methodology appeared first in legal studies and then later in theological studies is to establish a stronger bond between the study of the law as it appeared in Islamic higher education and the study of both canon and civil law as it emerged in 12th century Bologna. Makdisi presents evidence that points to the transference of scholastic methodology from Islam to Europe in the form of the legal disputation, thus indicating a tie between the study and practice of law as it occurred in both cultures, with

Islamic colleges of law predating those that arose in Europe by more than a century.[5]

Grabmann presents a coefficient cause for the evolution of scholastic methodology in the West, not linked directly but rather indirectly to an Arabic source.[6] The advance of the disputation as it became known in the West relied heavily on the availability in the early Middle Ages of the remainder of Aristotle's Organon not previously known in Europe, also his Prior and Posterior Analytics, both available in Europe as the result of Arabic manuscripts translated into Latin. These works particularly emphasized dialectic, the basis of scholastic methodology in both its Eastern and Western format. He argues that the more stylized form of scholasticism as evident in Thomas Aquinas' Summa Theologica could not have followed directly from Abelard's Sic et Non, but required the infusion of Aristotle's later works in its final statement. By the middle of the 12th and certainly into the 13th century, scholastic methodology stood at the core of the instructional methodology in all the faculties of the Medieval University.

It is now appropriate to examine more carefully those elements of scholastic methodology that existed in both Islamic lands and the Christian West. These methods appeared in Muslim institutions of higher learning over a

century prior to their identification in the Medieval universities of Paris and Bologna.

The Arabic form of Sic et Non, khilaf, defines the process of resolving disputed questions. It came into existence because Islam had no priesthood or ecclesiastical hierarchy to make authoritative decisions with regard to faith and morals. Where no clear statement could be found in the Koran or Tradition, Islam relied upon the Koranic passage that God would not allow his people knowingly to err in matters of faith and morals. Thus consensus of the community could guide the faithful. Two methods existed for deciding if consensus within the believing community had been reached on a specific issue. The first involved agreement among the recognized jurisconsults with the approval of the Calif that a certain ruling was authoritative. The second came from silence. If no one came forth with arguments against a specific opinion, the community could assume that consensus had been reached and the statement stood. The scholastic approach of khilaf, i.e., disputed questions, provided the means by which legal scholars underscored that differing views on specific questions existed and that consensus could not be assumed at that particular point in time. Legal scholars established rules for resolving these kinds of disputed questions as an academic exercise, but often no direct conclusion was ever proclaimed and promulgated by religious leaders.

Khilaf constituted an important instructional tool as well. Students compiled a great syllabus, the Ta'liqa, as they studied with a master which provided them their own resource material for decision making and instruction. The format used was that of disputed questions. Students duly noted all known arguments for and against a specific issue and added their own interpretation of the relative value of each in the margin. Students in Medieval universities used this same technique which they referred to as "glossing the text."

Christian schoolmen employed the same process of Sic et Non in the study of law as well as philosophy and theology. In the area of philosophy and theology, it initially allowed one to avoid charges of heresy that might be proffered by authorities if an individual scholar expressed an opinion that deviated from the prevailing theology of the time. As in its Islamic counterpart, the Western form of Sic et Non also included rules by which a scholar could analyze the two contrary statements.

Dialectics, the methodology that advocats a specific position on a disputed point, took the name jadal in Arabic. In both Islamic and Christian intellectual circles it offered a structured format by which to convince an opponent of the truth of a position and through logic to discredit the arguments presented by opposing views. This adversarial procedure drew heavily on the rules of oratory and rhetoric

as developed in the Greek and Roman world and transferred first into Islamdom and later the Christian West. Several noted Arabic textbooks on the process of dialectic from the Classical Age still continue in use.

Dialectics appeared in a more formalized structure through the disputation, in Arabic--munazara. The disputation as a formal, highly stylized presentation could be rendered in either oral or written media. The arrangement of the argument appears in much the same way in both Arabic and Latin literature. Basically it encorporated the following elements: (1) thesis and counter-thesis; (2) arguments for the thesis; (3) objections to the arguments; (4) replies to the objections; (5) pseudo-arguments for the counter-thesis; and (6) replies and refutation of these pseudo-arguments.[7]

In both Europe and Islamdom, the process of disputation also clarified the provinces of reasoning, distinguishing between that which could be argued from revelation and that from logic and experience. Dialectics, as it appeared in the disputation, affirmed faith and rationalized knowledge gained from experience. Two models of the perfected disputation come down to us. In Arabic, the Wadih of the philosopher ibn Aqil represents the premier statement of the disputation; in Latin, the Summa Theologica of Thomas Aquinas is considered the most valid model of scholastic

methodology. In both, reason and faith are harmonized and revelation is justified.

Disputation occurred as an instructional and teaching device in both Arabic and Latin school systems. It provided a means of examining the competence of students in both the knowledge base from which they worked and also their skill in presenting a logical argument in defense of a thesis. A student who could not dispute in both written or oral forms at an acceptable level as judged by his mentors could not hope to receive their approval nor earn a license to obtain a teaching position.

The inception of a student into the guild of masters as it occurred in the Medieval University was a formal event followed by a public celebration, a similar but more subdued process did exist in Islamic educational circles as well. In the Medieval University, the inception marked the community's acceptance of a student as a member of the guild of masters (universitas magistorium) and bestowed on the recipient all the rights and privileges of a teacher formalized in a <u>licentia docendi</u>.

In Islamic society, the inception, <u>dars iftitahi</u>, appeared as a more subtle event in a student's life. It portrayed acceptance by the brotherhood of scholars in a kind of abstract, generic manner. No formal ceremony marked the event, nor was a major celebration for the student and his colleagues obligatory. The <u>dars iftitahi</u> recognized the

promotion of a student to that of master by the other scholars in his particular region or city. It also could be accompanied by the awarding of a writ of his ability to teach a certain manuscript, the ijaza.

While licensure existed in both cultures, it evidenced some distinguishing cultural characteristics. In Islamic regions, the ijaza took the form of a personal letter from a mentor declaring that the student had completed a course of study under him and was now qualified to teach from his syllabus. In this regard, it acted as a restricted license. The ijaza was not granted by any formal structure within Islamic society.

The licentia docendi took the form of a document signed by the chancellor of the diocese, proclaiming that the recipient had the academic experience and qualifications to teach in broad subject areas in any of the church institutions within the diocese. Later, when some universities received a charter from the Pope, the license was expanded to allow the candidate to teach in any institution throughout Christendom, ius ubique docendi.

Despite these basic differences, a number of similarities existed as well. The licentia for both scholarly communities incorporated the same criteria: demonstrated competence in subject matter and the skills of instruction. In both cultures, society recognized the grantors' authority to award the license to deserving

students. For both it empowered the holder to seek a teaching position or to pursue a professional career. Finally both shared a religious attachment to licensure. In Europe, the church granted the license directly. In Islamic lands the letter was written by a religious person, the Shiek, guaranteeing the orthodoxy of the student in the subject matter studied.

As a result of the control of higher education by scholastic methodology, humanistic studies suffered a decline in both Islam and the Christian West. In both cultures liberal education bowed to the more specialized professional studies of the religious sciences, law, and medicine. In both, the pursuit of literature occupied a prepaedutic and elementary status when compared to the more advanced study of law, medicine, and theology.

If we cannot trace in any direct manner the transference of scholasticism in its Islamic form of the 9th, and 10th centuries to the rise of Medieval Christian universities in the eleventh and twelvth centuries, how then could it possibly occur that such an interaction between the two cultures took place and that Islam indeed did provide the source for scholasticism in the West? Bridges between the two cultures existed in a variety of places in the Mediterranean basin--in Spain, Sicily, southern Italy, and Byzantium. Certainly Spain, the center of translation activity emerges as a possibility. It stretches

credulity to believe that all those works of philosophy, theology, medicine, and science could have transferred into Latin and yet the methodology which sustained them in Islam did not. European medical texts, for example, originated in Toledo, and medicine as pursued in Islam employed scholastic methodology.

Sicily and the Italian states, where the revival of legal studies commenced in the Christian West, lay in close proximity to Islamic lands and thrived on trade with them. Again, it seems most plausible that the study of law as transposed into its Latin form carried with it scholastic methodology including disputed questions, the disputation, and the syllabus.

Perhaps the weightiest evidence points to Byzantium as the most prominent bridge between Islamic scholasticism and that which emerged in Medieval universities of the West. Photius, who later became the patriarch of Constantinople, resided as an ambassador at the court of the Caliph al-Mutawakkil in about 855. During his stay at the court, he would have had ample opportunity to observe Islamic scholars engaged in rational arguments and would have been exposed to the written works of scholars in which both the method of disputed questions and the disputation appeared. Later when returning to Constantinople, Photius wrote a major work in which he presented disputed questions on biblical, dogmatic, philosophic, grammatical, and historical

issues in a format similar to that which he observed in the capital of the Abbasid Caliphate. Other Byzantine scholars would have had ample opportunity to experience Islamic scholasticism either through direct experience while visiting in Islamic countries or through translated works available in the libraries of the Byzantine Empire. The close ties between Orthodox Christianity and Roman Catholicism would have allowed the transference of these works in their Latin form into the Italian peninsula and other parts of Europe. Through a series of iconoclastic movements in Eastern orthodoxy, it is known that Greek priests and learned men did flee into parts of Italy, carrying with them the knowledge gained from their Hellenistic past and from their encounter with Islamic learning of a more recent vintage.

Although the direct route cannot be traced, ample information has come to light to surmise that the rise and evolution of scholasticism in Christian Europe owed a debt to Islamic sources and certainly Arabic literature as transcribed into Latin. To strengthen the evidence more research is needed and, perhaps, with greater access to Arabic manuscripts, a clearer picture will emerge as to how this transference occurred.

If propositions establishing a causal relationship between the instructional methodology used in Islamic higher education and that which emerged a century later in

Christian Europe seem strained, a direct link between formal structures of higher education in Islamic lands and the universities that emerged in Europe appears even more tenuous. Despite similarities in structure and function and the presence of formal institutions of higher learning in Islamdom that predate the Medieval University, one could contend that such structures arose spontaneously from similar circumstances in both societies, evolving a pattern common to both in meeting the educational needs of a theocratic environment.

Both Islamic communities and Western Christianity founded colleges through the aegis of endowments. The principles of endowment that supported higher education in the Christian West differed from those proscribed by Islamic law. Wealthy patrons in Europe donated assets to religious communities to provide room and board for masters and novices. Such structures, labeled colleges, while housing students and faculty did not constitute a formal part of the university. An endowment granted to a religious community constituted a gift to the Church to pursue certain of its missions; once transferred the donor lost control over the assets which merged with the total resources of the religious body. Further, colleges initially did not influence the instructional program of the university, and endowing a college could have no impact on curriculum or instruction. Endowment, freely given, promised no hope of

control over the organization or educational programs of the university. These functions remained tightly in the hands of the Masters' Guild.

A similar restriction did not apply under Islamic law. Waqf, the process of endowment, acted as a means to support education and still preserve a benefactor's assets while granting a certain measure of control over its use. Through waqf the endower could dictate the qualifications for the staff in the college he founded and also the theological perspective underlying the religious sciences offered in the curriculum. The donor could appoint himself or a close associate the trustee and even provide for the continuance of the institution by dictating the method by which new trustees were appointed after his death--these could include members of his own family.

The basic motive underlying the system of endowment in both Islam and Christianity, however, appeared similar--the desire to perform charitable works and earn salvation. But the manner in which the dictates of the endowment were implemented created an important distinction in the two structures as they later evolved.

Though colleges in both regions created a living-learning environment for students, some important distinctions between the two forms shed light on the ultimate destinies of the institutions. In Islam society, the college endured as a self-contained structure,

sustaining only one professor who governed the curriculum and the academic lives of his students and assistants. A dedication and loyalty of students to the one master and his approach to the subject matter distinguished the Islamic college from the collegial atmosphere of its Western counterpart.

In Medieval Europe the college, while constituting a residence hall, supported a community of scholars, both masters and students, bound together not so much by the relationship between students and masters but by a shared dedication to a religious rule. Colleges in Europe took their model from the monastic system as it had evolved in the earlier centuries and continued into the Medieval period. Initially no instruction took place in European colleges; students and masters performed their scholarly activities in the context of the university guild and its structure. Only later did colleges offer instruction within their confines.

The religious orders that founded colleges differed from their monastic colleagues in that they depended upon donations from the public for their survival. Unlike traditional religious groups they did not own lands which provided their sustenence. Thus a close link emerged between the founding of the mendicant orders, such as the Dominicans and Franciscans, and the appearance of colleges. Endowments awarded to these new religious communities

supported their educational mission. In the Christian West, colleges drew support not from a single patron but from many donors. The administration of the endowed funds was a collegial function of the religious order involved.

From a structural perspective, while waqf facilitated the establishment of religiously oriented institutions of higher learning, Islam had no means of incorporation which would allow a group to band together in a legal identity so that it could perpetuate itself by replenishing funds or adding to the original endowment. Islamic law did not permit the legal fiction of incorporation which existed in the West. The document establishing waqf dictated by the donor could not be altered to meet contingencies. Losses could occur because of bad investments; destruction of property in war, fire, or other disasters; or the incompetence of the trustee. Any of these could deplete the original endowment, causing the dissolution of the school. The conditions for the granting of an endowment under Islamic law encouraged small, ideologically orthodox, family dominated institutions of higher learning. Few such structures survived beyond the life of their patrons or immediate heirs.

By the thirteenth century the early flowering of Islamic civilization had withered under the pressure of religious orthodoxy and the disruptive forces of newer converts to Islam who vitiated the impetus for scholarly

pursuit. The ultimate cataclysm occured in 1219 when the invading Mongol armies devastated Islamic cities in the Middle East, slaughtering teachers and burning colleges. In Spain civil war among Islamic provinces paved the way for their final dissolution at the hands of Christian armies. The influence of Islamic colleges upon Christian higher education ended with the reconquest of Spain and the rupture of trade between Europe and Islamic lands during the crusades. During that time, colleges in Islamdom had already attained their highest intellectual development. Becalmed for many centuries, they would create nothing really new in either curriculum or methodology. Contrasting with their torpor, European universities and the colleges within them would commence an educational voyage that endures to the present, building on the rational methodology and knowledge gained from Islam to cultivate the scientific method and to generate a seemingly endless flow of knowledge in all areas of inquiry.

END NOTES

1. M. Grabmann, Die Geschichte der Sscholastischen Methodes, Vol. I, p. 253.

2. Ibid., p. 242.

3. Ibid., p. 217.

4. H. Kantorowicz, "Quaestiones Disputatae of the Glossitors", Revue d'Historie du Droit, Vol. XVI, 1938, pp. 1-67.

5. G. Makdisi, The Rise of Colleges, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1981, pp. 262-3.

6. Op cit, Grabman, Vol. II, pp. 219-20.

7. Op cit, Makdisi, p.255.

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